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THE  
TRAINING OF LITTLE ONES  
FOR CHRIST:  
A SERMON:

BY THE  
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"I will take my stand where, as a child, my parents placed me, until the  
clear truth be found out."—*St. Augustine.*

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BALTIMORE:  
T. NEWTON KURTZ.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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BALTIMORE, *February*, 1853.

REV. J. A. SEISS:

*Dear Sir:*—The undersigned—your occasional hearers, and part of us members of your congregation—who had the high gratification to hear you deliver a Discourse in your Church on the morning of the 20th inst. on the occasion of the anniversary of the Sabbath School attached thereto—appreciating the value and force of the views, arguments, and truths it contained, and believing that it would prove useful to parents, individuals and the public,—respectfully ask that you would intrust the Discourse to us for publication.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

M. M. YEAKLE,  
DAVID FIROVED,  
H. A. WEBB,  
S. E. RICE,  
T. N. KURTZ,  
WILLIAM JOHNSTON,  
WM. GILLESPIE,  
L. RUST,  
JAMES GETTY,  
JOEL WRIGHT,  
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JNO. T. MORRIS,  
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J. MOREHEAD,  
ISAAC J. TIBBALS,  
WM. BRIDGES,  
GEORGE B. DELL,  
PHILIP H. GOSNELL.

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BALTIMORE, *March*, 1853.

GENTLEMEN AND BRETHREN:

I have received your communication, requesting a copy of the Discourse which it was my pleasure to deliver on the morning of the 20th of February last.

It is stated in a recent publication, that “The Lutheran Church in Germany, in the purest periods of her history, was distinguished perhaps above all other Churches, by her remarkable attention to the religious education of the young. Not only pastors, but parents and pious schoolmasters also, considered it *one of the most sacred duties to educate every child to practical piety.*” And as it is my hearty wish to see similar concern and fidelity in the Churches and families of our own country, and believing that the sentiments contained in the Discourse you desire to circulate are sacred truths, which must do good wherever they are carefully pondered and received, I very cheerfully commit the manuscript to your disposal.

With great respect,

J. A. SEISS.

TO M. M. YEAKLE AND OTHERS.

A BABE in a house is a well-spring of pleasure, a messenger of peace and love  
A resting place for innocence on earth ; a link between angels and men :  
Yet it is a talent of trust, a loan to be rendered back with interest ;  
A delight, but redolent of care ; honey-sweet, but lacking not the bitter ;  
For character groweth day by day, and all things aid it in unfolding,  
And the bent unto good or evil may be given in the hours of infancy :  
Scratch the green rind of a sapling, or wantonly twist it in the soil,  
The scarred and crooked oak will tell of thee for centuries to come ;  
Even so mayest thou guide the mind to good, or lead it to marrings of evil,  
For disposition is builded up by the fashioning of first impressions.

*Proverbial Philosophy.*



# S E R M O N .

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Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

EPHES. vi. 4.

IT IS a happy feature in human nature, that it is disposed to be specially interested in what is young. Our tenderest sympathies are with infancy. The very frolics and little failings of the small and helpless child, afford us pleasure. We may respect and admire the man, but we love the babe. There is something about infancy and youth, so far removed from crime—something so harmless, ingenuous, confiding and beautiful—that our hearts are at once captivated. This is one of man's better traits, and may serve to indicate what angelic gentleness characterized humanity before it was smitten by sin. And he who has no sympathy, and no kind feelings for children, is like the man who "hath no music in himself," and "is not moved with concord of sweet sounds;" he

"Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus:  
Let no such man be trusted."

True religion, then, as it accords with every thing that is pure and excellent in the dispositions of man, must necessarily evince special regard for children. I would no more trust myself to a religious system, deficient in this particular, than I would entrust my fortune to the hands of highway robbers, or my good name to the foul tongues of jealous-hearted defamers. And all schemes of faith and worship which disregard and exclude infants, or deny my little ones an interest in the favors and institutions of God, are to be execrated as a “perverted Gospel.”

It is, to my mind, no small relief and comfort, that the religion of the Scriptures is not wanting in tender references to infants. In all the dispensations of which the Bible treats—in the Old Testament, and in the New—by Moses, and by Jesus Christ—children are looked to with special care, and the most affectionate solicitude. The old economy, directing their reception into the Church on the eighth day after their birth, also brought the proper persons under obligations to teach them in the ways of the Lord, and to train them up in the fear of the Most High. And in the very opening of that dispensation which the adorable Saviour came to establish, he rebuked the cold-heartedness of his disciples, and said—“*Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.*” And just before he ascended to his throne in glory, he most solemnly charged his followers—“*Feed my Lambs.*” “*Feed my Lambs.*”



Accordingly, it has been the great concern of the Church of Jesus Christ, wherever she has been awake to her duty, to provide for the religious wants of children. And very far do we fall below our duty as Christians and parents, if we do not feel solemnly bound to do all that in us lies, to bring up our children as the text says, "*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*"

I suppose that no one needs to be informed what is meant by the bringing up of a child. All will at once agree, that it includes all that nourishment, education, training and protection which parents owe to their offspring.

Nor is there room for difficulty, as to the signification of the *nurture and admonition of the Lord*, παιδεία καὶ νοουθεσία Κυρίου—literally, *discipline and instruction of the Lord*, here spoken of. Culture in religion, and instruction and discipline in the ways of piety, are evidently the things in the Apostle's mind.

To bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, I would, therefore, interpret to mean, the supplying to them a system of culture, discipline and training, which has its origin, centre, and sanctions in God, and which seeks to bring them up Christians. It includes the whole subject of Christian nurture and education, and presupposes the existence of some Divinely instituted method which we are to pursue.

Of course, a theme so vast and vital cannot be thoroughly discussed within the limits of a single discourse; and if I can but succeed in extracting the

kernel, and evolving the spirit, of this apostolical injunction, I shall attempt nothing further.

I lay it down, then, as the essence of my conception of the text, and shall maintain it as a true and precious doctrine, that *it is in the contemplation of God, and should be in our contemplation, to have every child within the domain of the Church to grow up a Christian*, i. e. to open on the world as one possessing all the rudiments of spiritual renewal in Christ, without being able to remember the time when it went through a technical experience, but seeming to have loved God, and what is good, from its earliest years.

This, my brethren, is no new doctrine. I claim no originality, either for the doctrine itself, or for the arguments by which I shall sustain it. It is as old as the Church, and has again and again been presented and maintained, both before and since you and I were born. And if it should now come to the ears of any one as a novelty, it is only because the religious systems most in vogue about us, are constructed upon a foundation which is sadly deficient in some qualities held dear by devout people in other lands and ages. For with all our activity and aggressive zeal, there is a certain hardness and want of tenderness in our piety, which cannot be too much deplored, or too speedily rectified. We live in an age of steam and rail-roads, and enterprize, which carries out the heart into bold adventure, which alienates it from the genial warmings of home, and from the duties of quiet edification. There is too much of the warrior in our zeal,



looking to conquest, and not enough affection and love. Our religion is strenuous and fiery on great occasions, but deficient in loveliness and domesticity of character. There is no lack of bravery and daring in encountering Satan on the high field of battle, but there is no adequate care for those in the camp, and not concern enough for the little plants the while exposed to drought and frosts. We look, I fear, too much to the conquest of the world, and too little to the upbuilding of piety in our own hearts and families. The fragrance of our religion is not equal to its color. It is not as savory as it ought to be. We lean too much to the opinion, that men must grow up in sin, to be converted to Christ by the might of arms when once they have been sufficiently hardened and bronzed in guilt. We instruct our children, if we instruct them at all, with a view only to ultimate, not immediate effect. We give them their lessons without expecting fruit for years to come. And many view and preach religion as a thing so intensely personal, and depending so exclusively upon the will and choice of the individual, that they regard all attempts to infuse and cherish piety in children by nurture and training, as sheer nonsense and absurdity.

But why should we start back from the supposition that it is for the children of the Church to grow up in Christ? Why shrink from the demand of a religion which is so to penetrate us, as to make Christians of the very babes in our arms? It contradicts no doctrine of Scripture. It conflicts with no precept

or declaration of Holy Writ. Nor is there any thing in our philosophy to oppose it.

We all know that a child is a subject of deep impressions, even before it becomes a subject of oral instruction, and that these impressions are like seminal principles, which grow through subsequent life, and if not in some way counteracted, give complexion to the whole future character. The mere looks, tones, gestures, and handlings, of which the infant is made conscious, send an expression of feeling into its soul, which reproduces itself there, as by a law of contagion. The infant is thus made the subject of influences more penetrating and efficacious, than any logic, eloquence, or persuasion, that may be brought to bear upon it when once it has come to maturity. And it is also true, that the Gospel is really included in the life of every believer, and beams forth from him as a living epistle, before it is uttered by the lips, or delivered in language. And why may not the operative truth necessary to regeneration, be communicated through and from the parent, even before the child has learned to understand the meaning of words? Why may not the Holy Ghost make this *living* gospel effectual in the heart of the infant, as well as the *preached* gospel in the heart of the adult? Who dare limit the spirit of God? Theologians tell us, that "in the economy of grace, as well as in that of nature, Divine wisdom connects variety with regularity, and *changes its modes of procedure*



*according to circumstances.*”\*—Then, why should there not be a dispensation of the spirit appropriate and peculiar to the rudimental age of early childhood? Nay, to deny that there is such a special arrangement, is to cut off all departed infants from the hope of salvation; for all theology and common sense teach, that no mere babe can be the proper subject of conviction, illumination, and conversion, in the established sense of these terms.

It is also a matter of fact, that human nature is much more plastic and ductile, and that our control over it is much greater, in infancy, than at any other period. What, then, is to hinder the faithful parent from fashioning the young heart to true spirituality, or from moulding it under God’s grace to newness of life?—And why should we ever think of delaying our efforts to bring the child under holy influences, until its soul has been set and hardened to sin, and our power to impress it has vanished?

We regard our children as capable, in some measure, of sinning, and of entertaining wrong dispositions; why not also as capable of a dawning penitence becoming their years, and of cherishing a proper temper? We esteem them old enough to resist good; and why think them too young to receive it. I agree that they are born with a disordered nature, and bring into life with them a strong bias to evil. But this interposes no more impediment to the child’s

\* Dick’s Theology, vol. ii. p. 332.



cleaving to what is good and right, than that which it interposes in the way of his doing so in his one and twentieth or his fortieth year. The best Christian leads but a *mixed* life, the good ever combating with evil, and holding but a qualified sovereignty; and why may not this combat—this internal conflict—cover the whole life from its dawn, as well as the mere after part of it?

And what, indeed, could be more unfortunate for the child, than to have it taught, that it cannot be acceptably pious, until it has gone far enough in sin to feel the bitterness of repentance, and the struggles of conversion? Or, what could so much dampen and paralyze our efforts to bring up our children in holiness, as to be continually haunted with the belief that no fruit is to be produced, and that after all our endeavors our little ones will not learn to love and follow what is good, until they have first spent years in hatred and wrong?

But, there is also something in the relation between the parent and the child, which makes it easy to suppose, and natural to expect, that the faith of the one will be propagated in the other. A child can hardly be said to be born, until after it has entirely emerged from the years of its infancy. It has no separate and properly individual nature until then. Even its physical being is dependent for nutrition on organic processes not in itself. It comes into the world as but little more than a passive lump, highly organized, it is true, but only opening into conscious life under the soul of the parent streaming into its eyes and ears,



through the manners and tones of the nursery. It can do nothing, neither can it choose; and yet it is impressed and marked by every touch, and receives shapes and biases of mind and heart from what it sees, and feels, and hears. Sentiments and passions are awakened in it, like music is waked from the strings of the piano; and the character of the music is necessarily conditioned by the character and skill of the performer. Though it is in the world, it still lies within the matrix of parental life. And so long as it continues in this relation, the life and spirit of the parent will be flowing into it, just as naturally, and by a law as truly organic, as when the sap of a tree's trunk flows into the branches.

Now, it is generally agreed, that evil qualities and dispositions are transmitted by means of this organic relation, and why not, through God's renewing grace, good ones also? If "God layeth up the iniquity of the wicked for their children;" if he "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation;" shall we expect less of Him respecting the righteousness of the faithful? Is God more revengeful than he is good? Is His anger more enduring and far-reaching than His mercy and His love? Does He not also promise to bless our children in blessing us? Is He not presented to us in His word as "keeping covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations?" And if we turn to the New Testament, Paul talks to Timothy about "the unfeigned faith,"



which dwelt first in the grandmother Lois, then in the mother Eunice, and third in the son also. He does not mean that this faith had descended through these three generations in a bald and naked sense. But, according to the Apostle's conception, there was a power in the good life of these mothers, which transmitted a flavor of piety to their children. And it is a uniform thing for the Scriptures to associate children with the character and destiny of their parents.

And no matter how we view it, there is a very significant sense in which the child is a part of the parent. It lives the parent's life, partakes of the parent's character, and shares the parent's fortune. This is true in proportion to the age of the child, and the absence of countervailing influences from foreign sources. For there is no point in its history, as is sometimes imagined, up to which it is a moral nullity, and subsequent to which it is in a state of moral agency and accountability. It is only by degrees, in the slow process of years, that a child comes to the proper rank, dignity and responsibility of an individual creature. In that time changes may occur, by the death of the parents, or otherwise, to modify the natural tendencies of things. But where the natural course of things goes on, the child is included in the parents, living and moving and having all its being from and in connection with them, until it passes entirely out of its minorage. Its parents think, speak, believe, choose, and act for it; not barely as its repre-



sentatives, but in such a way as, in a good measure, to do *in* the child what they do *for* it. They awaken its faculties and feelings, just in accordance with what they address to it, and do for it. It is subject to their commands, not simply in external obedience, but internally and morally; and it can no more resist them, than it can stop the sun in his going forth. And even when it begins to act and think, they appoint its school; they choose its books; they direct its tastes; they regulate its company; and they decide the character of its religion, by taking it to a Church of their own selection. All their thoughts, and feelings, and exercises are translated into it. And the whole life which it lives, is not so much its own life, as the life of those who have charge of it, living in it.

Nor do parents thus infringe upon the rights and privileges of the child, as some would teach us. They are the responsible parties, and it appertains to them to exercise these prerogatives. They do but fulfil an office in which God has placed them, and act under a necessity which He has laid upon them. It is, therefore, a matter of Divine ordination, that the will and character of the child is included in, and necessarily fashioned by, the will and character of its parents. And when that child comes to act its own part in life, it comes with a color of evil, (or why not of good?) which it has derived from its parents and instructors, and for which they are accountable.

God has thus made human character eminently dependent upon organic relations. And instead of



allowing religion to be a thing exclusively personal, having regard only to each isolated individual and his Maker,—instead of directing us to leave the religious education of our children to be chosen and ordered by themselves in after life, He has, in His Word, and by giving us the position of parents, charged us with the care and formation of the moral character of our offspring, and He holds us as really accountable for them as for ourselves. His command is upon us, “*Train up a child,*” not for future conversion, but at once, “*in the way he should go, that when he is old he may not depart from it.*” We are solemnly bound to “*Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” He has given them into our care, and made it our imperious obligation, to mould them unto Himself, and to bring them up in Christ. And as He sent an everlasting curse upon the house of Eli, “because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;” so He also holds us accountable for the moral and religious character of our children.

And are we to suppose, such a just and holy Being would demand of us what he has not given us power to perform? Aye, let no man dishonor God’s adorable name by believing for a moment, that He has appointed a scheme of nurture and education which is utterly impracticable, and which can effect nothing better than to bring up children in sin and estrangement from Himself.



And what is the Sacrament of Baptism, as administered to infants, if it does not suppose the closest connection between the character of the parent and that of the child. Is it not the Divine seal to a faith existing in the parent, but accounted to the child, on the ground of a presumption that its faith is included in the faith of the parent? Surely, it is one great signification of Infant Baptism, that it points to, and proceeds upon the existence of a germ in the character and obligations of the parent, which has power, presumptively at least, to produce its like in his children. It is a rite that sees the child in the parent, and as a dependent on the parent, in its moral character as well as in its physical necessities. It is the Saviour's mark set upon the infant by virtue of the faith of its parents, or of those who undertake its spiritual fosterage. And are we to suppose that God has directed his marks to be put where they are meaningless, or where they do not properly belong?

Nay more; the point on which I insist cannot any longer be viewed as an open question. It has been decided and demonstrated by actual experiment. It is a settled fact, that children have been so nurtured and trained, as to grow up christians from early childhood. God said to Jeremiah, "*Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.*" John the Baptist was "*filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb.*" "*When Israel was a child, then I loved him,*" saith the Lord. Jesus tells us, that "*out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has perfected*



*praise.*” He also took little children in his arms, and said, “*of such is the kingdom of heaven.*” And he gave thanks to God and rejoiced in spirit, that the great mercies of the gospel, which were hid to many wise and prudent, had been revealed “*unto babes.*” “*From a child*” Timothy “*knew the holy scriptures.*” Richard Baxter, the fame of whose superior piety is as wide as the world, never could recollect a time when he did not love God, and all that is good. It is said of Philip Henry, that he was a man who gave careful attention to the training of his children; and the result has been, that all his descendants, for three generations, have ever been the lovers and servants of God. And it is alleged of a church, famous for its spirituality and missionary fervor, that not one out of ten of its members can remember the period when he began to be pious. And if it is not so with our children, we have reason to believe that the fault is our own.

I know that many apparently good people have bad and irreligious children. But that argues nothing against my position. All professors of religion are not christians. Many otherwise good men, are very careless in their attentions to their families. And many persons esteemed remarkable for piety are very disagreeable persons, passionate, fickle, petulant, or austere. Their spirit and bearing is just that which is most likely to make religion unpalatable, and the more odious the more urgently they commend it. Their piety is too much a mere profession, haughty and



exacting on public occasions, and not a sympathetic *life*, which shows most of its loveliness in retirement. They are severe and gloomy, and thus discourage and disgust their children, and insensibly alienate their minds both from their instructions and themselves.

And there are many good people who are very defective in their views of what and how a child should be taught. Their entire method is inappropriate, and consequently inefficient, if not deleterious. They set up too high a standard, one which neither they nor their children can keep. They tie down the buoyant spirit of childhood to austerities, and irksome duties and restraints, instead of winning and cheering it by what is lovely, and pure, and joyous. They disappoint and discourage it by demanding forms of experience which no properly nurtured child can ever have. And by some such defect they fail in their aim.

I have been astonished, in the course of my brief ministry, to find how generally our better classes of young people are kept aloof from the church, and its duties and privileges, under the delusive belief, that they must first experience some extraordinary internal revolution which they cannot realize. They are waiting for some rushing forth of Divine power, to fill their bones with trembling, to dry up for ever every worldly thought and feeling, and to lift them where they can see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending. The consequence is, they are disappointed; they are disheartened; often doubt the reality of such a thing as religion altogether; and linger

along with a sort of sad and sour feeling towards spiritual things, or turn for relief to something improper and unholy.

Now, I cannot but attribute this, in a great measure, to wrong training on the subject. These persons have been lectured about the struggles of conversion, the necessities of repentance, and the raptures of conscious pardon; they have been filled with a romantic or ideal view of christianity, which they never can realize; and all this when they needed rather to be bathed in affection and love, and encouraged to the easy duties becoming their age, in meek reliance upon the merciful Saviour. Probably when they were overtaken in mistakes or unconscious wrong, they have been harshly chided as wilful offenders, when they should have been pitied for their infirmities, and gently assured of forgiveness, if they did but sincerely set out to be more guarded and watchful in the future. And no parent should ever think of complaining of the impracticability of God's commands with respect to our children, until he has prayerfully ascertained, that he has nothing of this sort to blame in himself—no lack of faithfulness to lament—no indiscretion of manner or of temper to acknowledge—no mistake of duty to confess—which, under a better and more exalted piety, he might have avoided.

It is also true, that even the Church itself is sometimes to blame for the want of piety in the children of its members. Often it becomes careless and indifferent to the wants of the young. Sometimes an evil



spirit enters it, and rends it with divisions, or burns it up with fanaticism, or freezes it by a chill of worldliness, or petrifies it by frigid orthodoxy and formalism, and so creates a bad atmosphere which blights and withers whatever springing good there may be in the children. It is the business of the Church to make an element of genial warmth about the child—to press its hand with affection—to speak to it in kindness—to feed it with the sincere milk of the word—and to enlist its heart by surrounding it with tender sympathy. The Church has ever been called a *Mother*. This points to the tenderness and fostering concern which she is to feel for those committed unto her. And she disowns, and renders herself unworthy of one of her dearest titles, if she neglects to see after the little ones, or to provide them with competent and sympathizing instructors. And no wonder that our children should grow up in sin, where the Church meets them with coldness and frowns, or maintains towards them a forbidding aspect. But, if parents and the Church will but do their duty, as God intends they should, I am fully persuaded, that there is nothing to prevent any child, within the domain of the Church, from growing up a Christian, unable to tell when first it began to love God, or trust His grace.

Receiving this doctrine, then, as true, and believing that it is in the Divine intention, and our duty, that we should bring up our children to be Christians from their infancy, it now becomes an absorbing and vital inquiry how we, as parents and as a Church, are to proceed in

order to fulfil our obligations, and accomplish our work. Much remains to be said upon this point, though my present limits will permit me only to throw out a few general thoughts.

As to the duties of parents, I would say, the very first thing to be done by them is, to offer their children to God in holy baptism. If our children are to be trained up members of Christ's flock, we should begin by bringing them at once within the fold. Baptism is a Divine Sacrament, in and through which the Saviour offers, seals, and guarantees unto the subject that grace upon which the renewal of the heart depends; and if our children are at all to be embraced by the covenant of mercy, why deny them the seal of it? For more than nineteen hundred years infants of eight days were acknowledged and treated as parties to that covenant, and why not now, that its full excellencies appear? If our children are Christ's, and we are to train them for Him, how dare we withhold from them that sacred badge which He has himself commanded to be set upon *all his*? Why not bring them to him, that he may put his own mark upon them? Why not give them the benefit of those solemn obligations under which baptism places us, to do for them whatever in us lies? The course I advise certainly is the course which the Apostles laid down.—Under the great commission which the Saviour gave them, to “*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them,*” they baptized not only Lydia whose heart God had opened, but “*Lydia and her household*”—not only



the jailor, but the jailor "*and all his*"—not only Stephanas, but "*the household of Stephanas.*" Justin Martyr testifies of many of both sexes in his day, who were born before the Apostles died, "who had been *made disciples to Christ from their infancy*, and continued uncorrupted all their lives."\* Ireneus, the disciple of a companion and pupil of the Apostle John, speaking on the subject of baptism, which he calls our regeneration unto God,† says, "*Christ came to save all persons by himself, who by him are regenerated unto God; infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons.*"‡ And by the general consent of all Christian people from the time of the Apostles until now, and by the judgment of one hundred and forty-five out of one hundred and fifty millions of those who compose christendom at this hour, it is the solemn duty of parents to consecrate their children to God by the holy rite of baptism. Nay, to expect to bring up our children in Christ, without first giving them to Him in baptism, is like undertaking to build a house without a foundation—like seeking to bring them into communion with the fold by keeping them as far removed and excluded from it as possible.

There is, moreover, a hallowed influence going forth from this holy sacrament which is exceedingly desirable. What could be more persuasive to a child, as it grows to years of understanding, than to be told that

\* Justin. Apol. ii. p. 62.

† Τοῦ βαπτισματος τῆς εἰς θεὸν ἀναγεννησεως, etc., Irenae. lib. i. cap. 18.

‡ Irenae. lib. ii. cap. 39.

the condescending Saviour in whom it is taught to confide, has already taken it into his school, to grow up by his side as one of his disciples! Matthew Henry says, "I cannot but express my gratitude to God for my infant baptism, not only as it was an early admission into the visible body of Christ, but as it furnished my pious parents with a good argument (and, I trust, through grace, a prevailing argument) for an early dedication of myself to God in my childhood. If God has wrought any good work upon my soul, I desire with humble thankfulness to acknowledge the moral influence of my baptism upon it." And if God should call its parents to Himself, what could draw more tenderly upon the child's heart, than to remember that the father and mother whom it reveres, in their lifetime, brought it believingly in with themselves, to be owned in that general assembly of the just, and to partake with them in the grace which is now their song!

These, among others, are the grounds upon which I rest the baptism of infants. And it is with these considerations that I urge it as the first duty of the Christian parent.

The maintenance of a firm and kind family discipline is another important part of our effort. No society can be prosperous and happy without government; and family government is the most indispensable of all. Many are the charges to parents which the Scriptures give upon this point. "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother



to shame.” “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight to thy soul.” “He that loveth his son chasteneth him betimes.” We are not to be the mere advisers of our children, but their governors. Our word must be their law; and we are not to permit it to be transgressed with impunity. God has solemnly required that children be obedient to their parents; and He has endowed parents with the prerogatives to enforce that obedience. Our commands and requisitions must, indeed, be just and benevolent, not capricious and harsh; they must be thoroughly imbued with a Christian spirit; but they must be firm and decided. God conferred special blessings on Abraham because it was foreseen that he would “*command his children and his household after him;*” and without similar fidelity on our part, we need not expect the Divine favor upon our families.

And we must also attend to the *instruction* of our children. “That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.” And these instructions should begin with the first dawn of the child’s understanding. A distinguished theologian says, “The great and plain doctrines of religion should be taught so early, that the mind should never remember when it began to learn, or when it was without this knowledge. Whenever it turns a retrospective view upon the preceding periods of its existence, these truths should seem always to have been in its possession; to have the character of innate principles; to have been inwoven in its na-

ture; and to constitute a part of all its current thinking.”\* Nothing should be suffered to preoccupy the place which should be filled with the truth only. And through the whole period of childhood and youth, we must be incessant in our efforts to establish and confirm our children in the lessons of revelation; “speaking of them when we sit in the house, and when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.” Such, at least, is the solemn counsel of the Most High.

But, above all, we must see that we ourselves are pervaded with the spirit of faith, charity and devotion to God, which we desire to see in our children.—Baptism is not to be depreciated; Paul ranks it among the fundamental things of Christianity. A strong and decided family government is not to be undervalued; no children can be rightly trained without it. And faithful instruction is highly needful. But, in a case like this, precept without example, is worse than useless; and all the brute force in the world will be without effect.

Happily has Archbishop Tillotson remarked, that “to give children good instruction and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head, to show them the way to Heaven—while you take them by the hand to lead them in the way to Hell!” And we may lecture and threaten them, and batter and bruise their tender souls; but instead of making them pious, it will only extinguish in them what most of all should

\* Dwight's Theology, vol. 4, p. 193.



be cultivated, and crush that sensibility which is the great hope of their being. We are not to be savages, but fathers, and mothers, and Christians. We are to aim and study to inspire our children with a new life, and to this end, the Spirit of God must perpetually reign in us. And every child which the providence of God may place at our hearth, should operate upon us as a motive, strong as the love we bear it, to make us pure in our walk, and Christ-like in our spirit. We must let our children see and feel that religion is the chief concern with us—the great object of our own lives—or it is not likely to become the chief concern with them. No mock piety—no sanctimony of phrase, or longitude of countenance—nothing but a real life in the light of God's face, and the actual holding in exercise of the spirit we desire to see in our children, will suffice. Our character must be made a model character; for it will be their great copy. Every look, and smile, and word should be tempered in the Redeemer's love; for it will be translated into their hearts. And every reproof and correction should be softened with Christian affection, lest it should only stir up anger, hatred, and revenge.

Oh, what manner of persons ought parents therefore to be, in all holy conversation and godliness! What evenness of temper, what charitableness of feeling, what contentment and cheerfulness of spirit should we cultivate! Indeed, I can scarcely conceive of any thing in human society so melancholy and distressing, as to see a family of children growing up around a

thoughtless and unsanctified parentage. Earth sees no sadder sight than a godless father and a godless mother, rearing a flock of little ones in sin and wickedness, to become the prey of hell, and to go down with themselves to eternal death!

But the Church also has its work and share of responsibility in rearing and training infant hearts to piety and to Jesus. Some tell us, indeed, that the great and absorbing business of the Church is, to convert men to the gospel—to make sallies into the kingdom of darkness, and to lead captive those who have hitherto been enlisted in the armies of Satan. But such a conception of the object of the Church embraces about as much falsehood as truth. It is not simply an *army*, looking only to conquest and war, but a *school*, in which immortal souls are to be educated for Heaven. It is as much the Church's office to form and build up men to God, as it is to wrest them from the dominion of Satan. It is not only to convert men, but to ripen them in holiness of life, by careful discipline and nurture. The Church is not a mere battlefield, but a garden—not a mere huntsman in the wilds, but a fold and pasturage of blood-bought spirits. And we may readily believe, that one Christian, matured and well formed, is worth a score of mere beginners, who are in danger every day of proving perhaps, that they never began at all. I love and pray for genuine revivals, and rejoice to see the Church breaking in upon the dominion of sin and darkness; but if they are to be graduated in their value only by the number



of converts, we are deluded in hurrying after them with such fiery zeal. Religion has a deeper interest in times of non-revival, than in those periods of glowing excitement. Our mission is not only to pull down Satan, but rather to build up Christ. And in order to build up effectually and securely, we must have calm weather and quiet—we must have patient investigation of truth, and calm pursuit of principle, separate and apart from mere excitement and impulse. And we certainly are much less to be blamed as falling short of duty when we have no revival, than when we neglect to instruct, encourage, and mould such as are already within the fold.

Hence I say, that the Church has its work and share of responsibility in rearing and training children to Christ. It is the business and duty of the Church to show sympathy for these little ones—to care for them—to show kindness towards them—and to create a wholesome and attractive christian atmosphere about them. We must recognize, and make them sensible that we regard them, as part of the fold of Christ with ourselves. Every baptized child is a part of Christ's great family. It is marked as such by his own Divine authority. And as an officer in the Church, I am bound to claim and treat it as such. So also is every member bound to look upon it. To neglect and disregard it, we neglect and disregard Christ: for he himself says, *“whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me; but, whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a*

*millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."*

We are bound, therefore, as a Church, to see after the lambs of the flock, and to take care of them. We must provide instructors and instructions for them. We must gather them together, as best we can, in classes and Sabbath Schools, and special services of the sanctuary, to confirm and strengthen them in the gospel, and to supply to them what they do not otherwise receive. We must explain to them their condition and wants, lead them to obey and love the Saviour, and establish them in the doctrines of salvation, that they may remain steadfast unto the end. We must give them such reading as may have no taint or subtle poison, but bear with it the pure fragrance and beauty of heaven. We must pray with them, and for them; and not cast them off from our sympathies because they are yet young, and feeble, and ignorant. We must imitate the example of the Saviour who said, "*suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me;*" and who "*took them up into his arms and blessed them.*" A different population we will then find growing up around us; and the generation to come will rise to call us blessed.

Let us, then, as Christians and parents, take to heart the lessons of this day. Let us endeavor to profit by these reflections, and set ourselves to the discharge of duty with greater earnestness than ever. Let us consider the obligations that are upon us, and the greatness of the work which God has given into our hands.



And as he has made the eternal well-being of our children so much dependent upon us, let us strive to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Especially let us give ear to the solemn injunction of our exalted Redeemer—“*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*”

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion and fellowship of the Holy Ghost, rest upon, and abide with us all, both now and for ever, AMEN.

